

Why human creativity is still needed to navigate radical innovation

By  Juanita Pienaar

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The 2019 World Economic Forum on Africa recently took place in Cape Town. This year's agenda was focused on the 4th Industrial Revolution - as Africa prepares for the future by focusing on integration and innovation.

Expectations are that the application of artificial intelligence (AI) will have huge implications as 'machines' threaten to disrupt the labour market – performing complex tasks quickly and more accurately than their human counterparts.

But Amanda Alves, head of digital at, leading brand experience agency, Publicis Machine thinks AI will make the workplace more human, not less.

Here, she elaborates on why human creativity and innovation are still needed to navigate radical innovation. She also lets us in on which skills will be most at risk of commoditisation, as AI and machine learning enter the workplace.

■ ***Why is taking a 'business as usual' approach to the 4th Industrial Revolution – amid times of rapid change, climate change and social change – a risk to building a sustainable business?***

The old adage “the only constant is change” has never been truer than it is now. With automation and artificial intelligence set to replace a massive percentage of jobs currently filled by knowledge workers, companies will need to upgrade technology to keep up with competitors, and the current workforce will need to be reskilled for jobs in an automated environment.



Amanda Alves, head of digital at Publicis Machine. Image supplied.



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Entire industries will be redesigned – assigning certain tasks to humans, other functions to machines and some of these to a collaborative model where AI augments humans. Workflows and workspaces will evolve to facilitate human-machine collaboration.

Only those businesses that are able to swiftly adapt to a changing environment will flourish – Darwinian law has never been more intense.

■ ***Why would radical innovation, driven by disruptive technology, require human creativity to navigate?***

It is humans who will have to plan the implementation of adjustments to the workplace to ensure they are in line with the disruptive changes brought about by the 4th Industrial Revolution. From there, technology and AI will be employed to effect these.



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It will take unique human-interconnected thinking and strategic judgement to constantly drive and navigate these changes.

▣ ***Why would strategic thinking, creativity and innovation still be highly sought-after skills as we approach the 4th Industrial Revolution?***

We can automate learning but not curiosity. Human beings are able to infer connections, draw parallels and manifest ideas that are drawn from a vast frame of reference within each individual mind.



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AI will push strategic and EQ-intensive skills up the value chain – collaboration, empathy, creative problem-solving, decision-making and cognitive flexibility will all become sought-after. Just as polymaths shaped the Renaissance in the 16th century, so too will they be the humans who shape the 4th Industrial Revolution.

▣ ***Which skills will be most at risk of commoditisation – as AI and machine learning enter the workplace?***

Skills that pertain to routine and repetitive tasks that can be carried out more quickly and efficiently by an algorithm or a machine designed for one specific function. The risk of automation tends to be higher for lower-skilled roles for this reason. Anything that can be automated will be valued less in the coming of the 4IR.



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However, there will be a sizeable niche market for quality “handmade” and crafted goods, which will be seen as highly desirable due to human labour being much more expensive and therefore more valuable. We already see this with luxury goods such as the Hermès Birkin bag.

▣ ***How will this specifically impact the African continent?***

According to a workforce study of South Africa by Accenture, 35% of the present jobs in South Africa, 5.7 million workers, are at risk from automation.

Governments need to think carefully about re-industrialisation – organising national resources for the purpose of re-establishing industries – to grow the economy and reskill its workforce for jobs in an automated environment. Luckily, Africa is rich in ingenuity and problem-solving skills – necessity being the mother of invention.



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To augment this, we should be laying an educational foundation that teaches future learners how to think and collaborate. Technology and AI can supply all the answers, but knowing which questions to ask is a uniquely human trait.

Connect with [Amanda Alves](#) on LinkedIn and visit the [Publicis Machine](#) press office for all the latest news and updates.

ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.

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